



DHS Matters!

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Produced by DHS Office of Communications, Suite 1510, Grand Tower, Lansing

Submit stories by e-mail to DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov

Pageant contestant raises awareness about foster care

Published by Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/whatsnew/news/jen_leedy.htm

Jen Hope Leedy, a participant in the Michigan Youth Opportunity Initiative site in Macomb County, came home from the 2008 Miss Michigan USA pageant last September with the "Miss Photogenic" award.

"I was so shocked," said Jen, 20, a sophomore at Macomb Community College and a former foster child. "It was my first pageant, and never in a million years did I think I would get an award like that. It's one of only two awards besides the actual title, so I was really happy."

Jen liked the pageant experience so much that she has decided to enter one or more of the pre-qualifying pageants for the Miss Michigan title, an entirely different competition. Winning the Miss Michigan title would enable her to compete in the Miss America pageant.

Jen views her participation in pageants as a way to increase awareness of the needs of youths in foster care. In an essay for the Miss Michigan USA pageant, she wrote: "I have overcome abuse, neglect, and the struggles of the foster care system first hand."

"I have experienced 12 years of abuse and neglect at the hands of the people I most trusted, my parents. I then endured eight years of the foster care system, and now I am facing the challenge of making it completely on my own."

"I have overcome the barriers of my past, my family and even myself. I can truly say I am a survivor! I developed resiliency, perseverance, and determination to make changes for other youths like myself."

Jen plans to transfer to Oakland University and major in communications, with the goal of becoming an author and international motivational speaker. She was an officer of Macomb County's Youth Board, called Spirit, for two years. As vice president of the youth board, she provided feedback on development of the Web site www.michigan.gov/fyit

"We provided a lot of suggestions about what information would be interesting to people of our age, what would be useful and what would catch our eye," she said. "This site makes it easy to find all the information instead of searching through Google or all the other sites. I hope more states do the same thing."

In March, foster youths presented a report outlining ten priorities to guide state policies and services for foster youths soon to leave care to members of the Michigan Legislature. "Voice 2: Discussing Issues and Concerns of Michigan Foster Youth" is the work of 18 youth boards representing 28 counties. It evaluates the progress on the youth boards' original 15 recommendations issued in 2005 and asks the DHS and Michigan courts to continue working on issues critical to young adults who will soon leave or have recently left foster care. To view the report click this link:

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/fyit/DHS-Voice2-Foster-Youth_219008_7.pdf



Jen Leedy

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Celebrating community spirit and black history in Macomb County

From Yvonne Brock

Macomb DHS Mt. Clemens District

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February was a very exciting month in Macomb County. Our Black History Month Committee developed a calendar of events this year that included a brown bag lunch and discussion around the movie "Remember the Titans" starring Denzel Washington and a Hustle 4 Health luncheon. A highlight of the month was a presentation by Detroit-based motivational speaker Johnathan Edison.

Mr. Edison noted that we all should "blast off into something positive." He told us the staff that works at DHS supports those in need and we should be positive and proud of our work. He encouraged us to stay positive in challenging times, saying many of our clients don't have a job, a home, or even \$5 in the bank and rely on our help. Mr. Edison closed by saying, "All you can do is all you can do. Just be sure to give it your all." In honor of his presentation Macomb County staff made a donation to the Public Broadcasting System. You can learn more about Mr. Edison and his work at www.jonathanedison.net

The second major event this month was the launch of "A New Way of Doing Business," the kickoff to build community partnerships in Clinton Township. A group of dedicated cash assistance and children's services staff put together a presentation for their peers on how community partners can empower and support our families and DHS workers. DHS has always supported collaboration and working closely with the community. This is a targeted approach to work with Clinton Township which has a high removal rate for children coming into foster care. Our next step is to present directly to the community champions of Clinton Township as we begin this most important work.

Very special thanks to [Cassandra Thomas](#), [Adam Baker](#), [Amy Lawrence](#), [Erica Johnson](#), [Marie Dissmore](#), [Katie Sowers](#), [Vernice Warren](#), [Lisa Mayfield](#), [Kristine Fremont](#) and [Dave Buscher](#) for organizing this event. Thanks to all who volunteered and participated in the events during the month.



Motivational speaker Jonathan Edison with Macomb County Black History Month Committee members [Mona Lindsay](#), [Cassandra Thomas](#), [Angela Cusmano](#), [Cheryl Howell](#), [Erica Johnson](#), [Yvonne Kidd](#), [Robbin Grimes](#).

Lament for a friend gone too soon

From Susan K. Hengesbach for the friends of Anne at DHS

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[Anne Bennigan-Diaz](#) was an employee of Ingham County DHS for more than 25 years. She died Feb. 29, 2008 one month after being diagnosed with cancer. She was 61 years old and looking forward to a well-deserved retirement.

Anne had a big heart and a big laugh to match. She lived in Traverse City until she was 10 and loved to travel to Lake Michigan and Lake Superior with her friend Tearie. She loved the water and watching boats out on the water. Anne joined a convent after graduating from high school. She later graduated from MSU, traveled to Spain to study the Spanish inquisition, and wanted to be a history professor. She trained search and rescue dogs, played the violin and piano, and loved going on mystery trips with her friend Fran. She enjoyed listening to Celtic music and old-time sailor ballads. Her favorite movie was "Master and Commander" which she saw 23 times before buying the video. She loved Mel Gibson, her cat Bob, and her family and friends. We will miss her a lot.

This text, from "A Heartbeat From Heaven", speaks for us: "We are living on the border of eternity each day. We are just as close to heaven as the star's so far away. And the only thing between us whether we are big or small, is a tender little heartbeat, just a heartbeat, that is all". Her heart will always beat forever in our lives.



SGM Gary Gross

DHS employee leaves to serve state and country

From Mary Grill

Michigan Community Service Commission

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Another state employee has left for the front lines in the war on terrorism. The 126th Press Camp Headquarters (Public Affairs Unit), based in Ft. Custer, left Feb. 21 for a one-year combat tour in Baghdad, Iraq. In charge of this Michigan Army National Guard unit is Sergeant Major **Garry Gross**. In addition to being responsible for his unit, Garry is the director of finance for the Michigan Community Service Commission, a part of Michigan Department of Human Services. The mission of the 126th Press Camp involves media support and requires the efforts of 30 soldiers whose duties include broadcasting, journalism, photography, and various administrative and support functions. Family members and friends were on hand during a ceremony for their loved ones' departure including Garry's wife, Danette (right), who is also a state of Michigan employee and a master sergeant in the Michigan Army National Guard.



■ For more on Michigan Community Service Commission go to <http://www.michigan.gov/mcsc>

Going the extra mile for those in need

By Cheryl A. Ruley

■ Martha Burns of Crawford DHS submitted this story for publication.

Many people have been known to "go the extra mile" in their work and volunteerism, but one man has gone 140,000 extra miles, all for the welfare of others.

Donald Henry, 71, and wife, Shirley, 74, of Grayling were recently recognized by the Crawford County DHS for five years of volunteer work, driving clients to doctor appointments and crucial medical treatments. Many people in the community have no reliable means of transportation and that's when the Henrys' wheels came to the rescue.

Born and raised in West Virginia, Don worked his way through life with jobs loading coal cars and laboring in a rubber manufacturing plant, steel mill and paper mill. He also worked construction and auto repair, and found time to serve his country for 17 years in the U.S. Air Force and Army Reserves. Henry's last wage earning job was as a cab driver but that came to an end in March 1985 when a drunk driver plowed into his cab, leaving him with a broken neck and five crushed vertebrae. He was unable to work, especially any physical labor for which he was most accustomed.



Donald Henry and wife, Shirley

In 1995, Henry moved to Grayling where he met Shirley. Mrs. Henry retired after 25 years as a bus driver for an agency serving developmentally-challenged and disabled people. One day Don visited the DHS and explained his desire to help with driving. After completing the necessary screenings, including one to determine his ability to operate a vehicle, Don began what became his mission to help others, with Shirley by his side when needed.

From June 2002-Aug. 2007 Don "used up" two personally-owned vans. He put 60,000 on the first, a 1994 model, and 80,000 on the second, a 2001 model, which now sits semi-retired in his driveway. If the walls of those vans could talk, they would tell of the many people who sat waiting, some anxiously, to arrive at life-saving treatments. Don said many sat quietly, barely saying a word and others had stories to tell of their lives, family and friends. "It's been something good to do and I've met a lot of interesting characters," Don said. "And it gave me a little spending money."

"Don was extremely generous with his time and almost never said 'no' to a request to drive someone somewhere," said Martha Burns, DHS services supervisor. "He went in the worst weather and, at times, in the middle of the night. He was committed to the people DHS serves and was always there for them."

"Don always had a positive attitude and never had a bad word to say about anyone. Shirley was his 'co-pilot' when he needed someone to accompany him on a long journey. She was always willing to go and happy to give people a ride when they were in need. Don and Shirley exemplify the best of volunteer spirit."

Date: Feb. 25
To: Karen Golejewski
DHS Customer Service Unit, Lansing
Subj: Thank you

I am writing to thank you and your staff for your assistance with the many constituent cases my office has forwarded to you over the past year. As a direct result of your efforts, whenever I am in the 17th district I often have the pleasure of my constituents coming up and thanking me for assisting them. Although this makes me look good, it is owed entirely to the job you and your staff perform. Specifically I would like to give special mention to the efforts of **Wendy Griffen**. Ms. Griffen was recently contacted by (a member) of my staff with a very serious constituent problem. Ms. (name withheld), a resident of the 17th district, required a bone marrow transplant and had a very small window of opportunity to receive this potentially lifesaving procedure, but was unable to get confirmation of her Medicaid status. (My staff member) contacted your office and Ms. Griffen was immediately able to sort out the problems and put my office in contact with the correct people in Wayne County. I am pleased to report (name withheld) was able to receive the treatment necessary to fight her disease. To hear stories like this helps reinforce the reason why one enters public office. Again, thank you for your hard work and dedication.

Andy Dillon
Speaker of the House
17th District

■ Wendy Griffen is a department analyst with DHS Customer Service Unit, which handles thousands of customer and legislative case inquiries like the one mentioned in this letter. It is administered through DHS Office of Communications and is based in Lansing. The author is speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives.

Date: Feb. 8
To: Jim Nye, Deputy Director
DHS Field Operations Administration
Subj: **Julia Choate**

I am writing this letter to thank you and everyone in the Department of Human Services chain of command that has had a part in providing the talents of Julia Choate to Saginaw County Community Mental Health Authority (SCCMHA). The cost of Ms. Choate's position is jointly funded by DHS and SCCMHA and this arrangement has been in place for several years now. Ms. Choate has been with us for 18 months and I cannot begin to pay adequate tribute to her many contributions to our organization. Her due diligence in assisting any potentially eligible consumer with enrollment in state entitlements has been exceptional.

Ms. Choate has gone the extra mile with every case and every challenge we have brought to her. She has a wonderful style of coaching our staff to help them learn more about the entitlement enrollment process and her guidance has made all the difference. In addition she has exceeded our expectations in correcting enrollment errors of the past that has resulted in many of our consumers gaining maximum Medicaid coverage and movement away from "spend down" status. These corrections have not only assisted the quality of life for our consumers directly, (they have) saved SCCMHA well over \$40,000 in the general fund portion of our budget. The savings to SCCMHA result when we no longer need to cover the cost of care and treatment during the spend-down window as these individuals are now covered by Medicaid all month.

We cannot say enough about Ms. Choate's many talents and how well she is working with our staff. Our thanks extend as well to her supervisors **Lori Scorsone**, **Dave Young** and director, **Randy Barst** in our local DHS office. It is so seldom those of us in public service receive any thanks for what we do. I just could not let another month go by without writing to you and expressing our sincere gratitude for the partnership we share with DHS in this entitlements area and to take a few minutes to tell you about the talents of Julia Choate.

Sandra M. Lindsey, CEO
Saginaw County Community Mental Health Authority

■ Julia Choate is an eligibility specialist working off-site in Saginaw. The other noted employees work for DHS in Saginaw County.

Your letters,
intercepted
and otherwise

To submit a customer letter for publication:

- Get your supervisor's approval.
- Clients must give written approval for us to use their names - use a **Consent for Publication** form from the MS Word template as form **0199.dot**
- Get the verbal permission of all nonclients named in the letter including letter writers and DHS staff. We can't use their names without their permission.
- Send the letter and a copy of the signed consent form by fax (517-373-8471) or by e-mail to **DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov**
- Include the letter writer's hometown and the job classification(s) of the employee(s) cited in the letter.

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